
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics

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Item 6 (c) of the provisional agenda*

Reports brought to the attention of the Committee: report of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Asia-Pacific task team on implementation of the Secretary-General's regional reform phase two recommendation for a region-by-region change management process for data and statistics

Report of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism and the Asia-Pacific task team responsible for implementing phase two of the Secretary-General's United Nations development system regional reform**

Summary

The present document is a report of the Thematic Working Group on Statistics of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism, including work in support of the Secretary-General's Regional Reform Phase two recommendation for a change management process for data and statistics. The document builds on previous reports of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific.

In abolishing the Partners at the sixth session of the Committee in October 2018, it was agreed responsibilities and functions of the Partners would be transferred to the Thematic Working Group. The Committee further asked that progress by the Thematic Working Group be reported at the seventh session of the Committee on Statistics.

* ESCAP/CST/2020/L.1.

** The present document is being issued without formal editing.

I. Introduction

1. The Thematic Working Group on Statistics of the Asia Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism is a regional network of international, regional and subregional organizations. It was established in 2016 to enhance synergy and complementarity among programmes and activities of United Nations agencies in the region for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and statistical development, and to address the statistical and data-related concerns of the other thematic working groups of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism.

2. The objectives of Thematic Working Group include: (a) supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through effective and efficient support for monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the country level and a sustainable approach to statistical capacity development of national statistical systems and stakeholders of the national data ecosystem; and (b) providing a coordinated strategy, process and mechanisms for statistics and data input for regional input to the global processes, and for regional implementation of global mandates, including follow-up and review of progress with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. The Thematic Working Group is co-chaired by Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, with membership covering Asia-Pacific offices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Pacific Community (SPC) and Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21).

4. The Thematic Working Group meets quarterly. A summary of its activities since the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics is presented below.

5. In 2019, the Thematic Working Group also acted as an Informal Working Group for implementation of the United Nations Secretary General's Regional Reform Phase two recommendation to implement a change management programme for data and statistics. Membership of the Thematic Working Group expanded to include the United Nations Sustainable Development Group's Asia-Pacific Development Coordination Office to undertake this task.

6. The recommendations of the Secretary-General are currently under the consideration of member States. If approved, the Thematic Working Group may evolve to sit under the proposed new Regional Cooperation Platform.

II. Activities of the Thematic Working Group

7. The main activities of the Thematic Working Group during the period since the sixth session of the Committee on Statistics have been related to (a) the Secretary-General reforms of the United Nations development system to improve the coordination of capacity-building activities and (b) responses to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

Reforms to the United Nations development system

8. The reform of the United Nations development system involves a set of far-reaching changes in the way the United Nations development system works to help countries around the world in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The reform is mandated by the General Assembly in resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018 and is delivering a range of reforms including:

(a) A reinvigorated United Nations resident coordinator system is now in place, ensuring stronger and independent leadership of the United Nations development system at the country level. On 1 January 2019, all resident coordinators took over their new functions as the highest-ranking development representative of the United Nations system, leading 131 United Nations country teams (of which 32 in Asia and the Pacific) serving 164 countries and territories, to deliver collective responses to national needs and ensure system-wide accountability on the ground. Resident coordinators report directly to the Secretary-General;

(b) A new generation of United Nations country teams is taking shape, more cohesive and responsive to national needs and priorities. The composition, roles and profiles of each country team are tailored to the context, and deliver shared results, including through a redesigned United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (Cooperation Framework) that has become the main strategic instrument to respond to national needs and priorities;

(c) A revamped regional approach, implemented in two phases, to optimize functions and enhance collaboration at the regional and subregional levels (phase 1) and to provide options, on a region-by-region basis, for longer-term reprofiling and restructuring of the regional assets of the United Nations (phase 2).

9. The reinvigorated United Nations resident coordinator system was the focus of the attention of the Thematic Working Group in late 2018 and 2019. The Thematic Working Group collaborated with several United Nations resident coordinators whilst stressing the role of the Group, its regional focus, and the mandates of its members. It was generally accepted the United Nations resident coordinator system should engage with Thematic Working Group members directly rather than the Group itself as it is members who have the mandate, resources and flexibility to respond to country priorities.

10. Each resident coordinator's office has established a data officer and economist role. The data officer role is primarily focussed on supporting the resident coordinator's office with data for monitoring and evaluation purposes but is also an opportunity for bringing coherence and greater coordination to national capacity development activities. The Thematic Working Group will aim to work with the network of United Nations data officers in Asia-Pacific.

11. Many United Nations country teams have established a data-related working group (e.g. Data for Development Group, or Data for Results group) and members of the Thematic Working Group have either joined these country-level working groups or work closely with their counterparts.

12. The revamped regional approach has been the key focus of the Thematic Working Group in 2019 and 2020. The Secretary-General's report on Implementation of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, 2019¹ made five recommendations on key areas of transformation to guide the longer-term re-profiling and restructuring of United Nations development system assets at the regional level, including to initiate a region-by-region change management process consolidating capacities on data and statistics to minimize duplication and foster regional collaboration on data and statistics (recommendation 4).

13. Informal Working Groups were established under oversight of the Executive Secretary of ESCAP and the Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Asia-Pacific. The Informal Working Group on recommendation 4 to consolidate capacities on data and statistics to minimise duplication and foster regional collaboration on data and statistics comprised the Thematic Working Group on Statistics plus the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Asia-Pacific Development Coordination Office. The group was tasked with developing an Asia-Pacific recommendation 4 roll-out plan.

14. The roll-out plan was developed by taking stock of existing regional data, statistics and analytical functions in Asia-Pacific, including taking stock of global data, statistical analytical functions being undertaken with Asia-Pacific countries by global partners, evaluating opportunities for consolidation of global, regional and subregional data, statistics and analytical functions and discussion on what should be consolidated. The group agreed on the following:

(a) To consolidate reporting on progress towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Progress Report;

(b) To consolidate access to data and statistics on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Goal Gateway;

(c) To regularly map and share national capacity building plans to foster coordination, collaboration and minimise duplication.

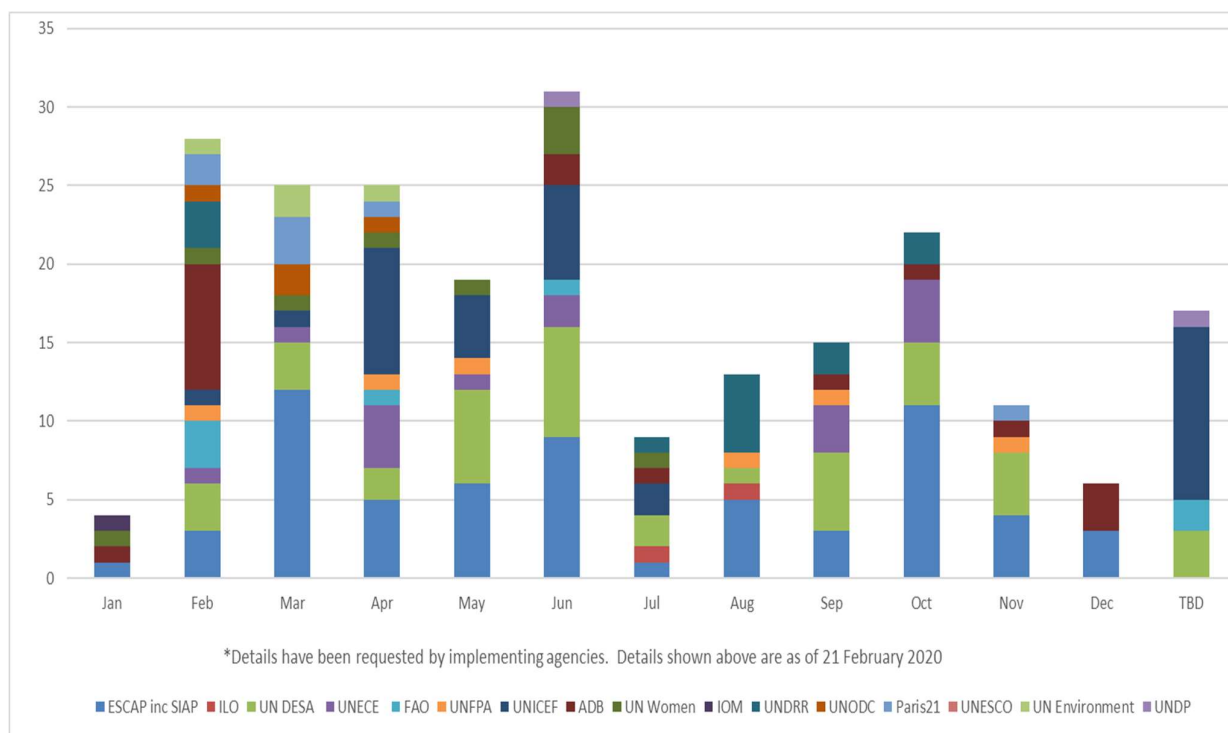
15. A mapping of national capacity building plans for 2020 was undertaken by the group prior to COVID-19. The mapping identified over 200 planned activities with Asia-Pacific countries in 2020, by 15 partners including regional and global United Nations partners and ADB and Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21) (figure 1). The number of activities would now be significantly smaller due to restrictions in place due to COVID-19. However, most activities were re-orientated towards virtual modalities.

16. In compiling the mapping, little duplication was identified mainly because since its inception in 2016 the Thematic Working Group has nurtured a collaborative spirit and many members already undertake national capacity building activities in partnership with each other.

17. The mapping exercise was shared with the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism who commented positively on the prospective nature of the mapping and encouraged the group to continue to refine and improve efforts to minimize duplication and foster collaboration on data and statistics in Asia and the Pacific.

¹ A/74/73–E/2019/4.

Figure 1
Planned data, statistical and analytical capacity building activities in 2020 in Asia and the Pacific as of 21st February – pre COVID-19



COVID-19

18. The Thematic Working Group was well placed when the COVID-19 pandemic required the re-orientation of work plans. The Thematic Working Group compiled a snapshot of data and statistical resources developed by the international statistical community and shared it with the United Nations resident coordinator system and United Nations country teams. Members of the Thematic Working Group also contributed to efforts of the global Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities.

19. The Thematic Working Group have also agreed to draft common tools and knowledge products (blogs, briefs, etc.) on data and statistics for the 2030 Agenda for use by members of the group, United Nations country teams and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group Asia-Pacific to provide support and respond to questions raised by national statistical institutions and other partners. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forward plans for these areas, with collaborative efforts on civil registration and vital statistics, population and economic censuses and survey operations.

III. Going forward

20. The Thematic Working Group was formed under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism. The Secretary-General's United Nations development system reforms propose to establish a new regional coordination mechanism, a Regional Coordination Platform, to replace the Regional Coordination Mechanism. The Thematic Working Group on Statistics has prepared to continue under the Regional Coordination Platform, probably with a renewed name and terms of reference.

21. The focus of the Thematic Working Group will nonetheless remain the same with regional coordination and cooperation its key objective.
